Learning to Hope Like a Bartledan

In *Mostly Harmless*, the final book in Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series, an alien race known as the Bartledans. They are described as being almost exactly like humans, except that they do not hope, wish, or dream.

Wishing a Bartledan a good evening is cause for confusion. They play games and sports, but never with a desire to win – the team or player that wins, has in fact won. Their literature is completely non-fiction, and always exactly 100,000 words. If the plot is too short, self help text is added. If the story is too long, it simply drops off completely, mid-sentence.

The Bartledanians' brief place in the story, which is a whirlwind satire of our world conducted by dealing almost not at all with Earth itself, seems to highlight how we take for granted the fact that we spend so much time wishing and hoping for things.

Hope is a deeply ingrained part of human life. It is also one of the greatest three virtues, specifically when it is oriented to our hope in God's promises of love, salvation, and eternal life. It's not a virtue to hope for evil, of course.

However, we hope, and wish, and dream about a lot of things that are not God's love, our salvation, or eternal happiness. We hope for worldly things, even good things, like financial security or better jobs, or great things for our children, friends, and family. These things are in the future, and largely, if not completely, beyond our control. We even dare to wish things were different in the past, or that certain decisions were made differently. This can be wistful or bitter, or somewhere in between.

As Christians, our hope should be oriented to God and his promises. One definition of the virtue is "the desire of something together with the expectation of obtaining it." When we are hoping for something that is not guaranteed, and that is not in our control, and not promised us by our Creator, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment.

In worldly matters, perhaps we have something to learn from the Bartledanians. Will I get that promotion? Will the harvest be good next year? Will my son be a doctor? Those things will be what they will be, and no worrying or hoping (or vibrating or tapping or rain dancing) will change it. You cannot even will control over your hair, much less your life or those of others (Matthew 5:36). Hoping for worldly things and goals leads to worry, fear, and despair. Seek the Kingdom first!

Live with true hope in the promises that have been made by God, that you believe will be true. In everything else, take it one day at a time, living more and more each day as Christ taught.

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